



Canadian Radio-television and
Telecommunications Commission

Conseil de la radiodiffusion et
des télécommunications canadiennes

Canada



News Release

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CRTC ANNOUNCES PUBLIC HEARING AND REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON APPROACHES TO BETTER PROTECT CHILDREN AGAINST TV VIOLENCE

OTTAWA/HULL — The CRTC today announced that it will conduct a public hearing starting October 11, 1995 on the issue of violence in television programming (Notice of Public Hearing CRTC 1995-5). The hearing will allow the public to comment on the specific approaches to TV violence set out in the notice of public hearing, as well as provide a forum for alternative suggestions to address the issue. Prior to the hearing, the Commission will hold regional consultations across Canada to ensure maximum participation by Canadians in this process.

"Canadians have told us in many ways for many years they want better protection of their children from TV violence," said CRTC Chairman Keith Spicer. "This includes the 157,000 citizens who signed a petition after the December 1989 massacre at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique; the more than 1.3 million Canadians who then signed Virginie Larivière's November 1992 petition calling for a ban on TV violence; the scores of groups that subsequently appeared before the Parliamentary Committee that examined the issue and then made specific recommendations to us in its strongly worded report; the 375,000 members of the Canadian Teachers' Federation and the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec who joined forces last fall to demand legislation banning gratuitous TV violence; and the hundreds of Canadians who've called the Coalition for Responsible Television's 1900 number to express their concerns about TV violence."

"For almost three years now, the CRTC has worked with citizens' groups and all sectors of the TV industry to try to better protect children against glamorized, gratuitous TV violence, and with considerable success," Mr. Spicer explained. "For example, we've approved self-regulatory codes for Canada's private broadcasters as well as pay-TV and pay-per-view licensees. We've also encouraged technological developments that would give consumers greater personal control over the programs coming into their homes. The time has now come for additional public input before taking the issue any further."

The Commission has followed a long-term approach to reducing TV violence that is guided by these principles:

- to strike a balance between protecting children and respecting freedom of expression;
- to draw upon cooperation from, and voluntary action by, the broadcasting industry; and
- to ensure a level playing field between all sectors of the broadcasting industry.

This approach has focused on four key planks:

- self-regulation by the broadcasting industry;
- a national programming classification system;
- empowerment of consumers through technology; and
- media literacy and public awareness programs.

The Commission believes that in order to achieve its long-term objectives, parents must have the tools to make informed choices for themselves and their families. One way of doing this is through the development of a classification system to rate programming according to the amount and nature of violent content. Another is through parental control devices such as the V-chip. The Commission acknowledges the efforts carried out to date on classification by the Canadian broadcasting industry's Action Group on Violence on Television and the V-chip field trials by Shaw Cable in Edmonton.

Today's notice of public hearing sets out a number of key questions with respect to a national programming classification system. These questions relate, for example, to the nature of the system, the types of programs to which it would apply, the body responsible for rating programs, and whether additional measures beyond classification would be necessary.

In the short term, the Commission must deal with a more immediate problem – the unequal application of restrictions on television violence across the broadcasting system and, in particular, between Canadian broadcasters and foreign services distributed via cable. This problem became evident in the wake of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council's November 1, 1994 decision that the children's program "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" violated the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' violence code. Global Communications Ltd., the broadcaster against which the complaint was filed, requested a modified version of the program from its producer. Two other Canadian broadcasters – YTV and the TVA network – withdrew the program from their schedules. However, Power Rangers can still be broadcast in its original version on foreign signals distributed by cable. It can also be aired by other Canadian broadcasters, since under current CBSC procedures, a decision by the Council only binds the broadcaster that was the subject of the complaint. This leaves two different standards for children's programming entering Canadian homes.

Today's notice of public hearing outlines a possible approach to levelling the playing field for Canadian broadcasters and for ensuring that Canadian TV violence standards apply equally to all signals watched by Canadian viewers. This approach would require distribution undertakings to curtail or encode any program which has been found to violate an approved code on violence. This would apply to cable companies as well as to other distribution undertakings such as direct-to-home (DTH) satellite services or multi-point distribution systems. One means of implementing this approach would be to amend the Cable Television Regulations, which currently prohibit undertakings from altering any programs they distribute. It may also require modifications to industry codes to ensure that all licensees are bound by any prohibition against distributing a specific program.

Anyone seeking to appear at the public hearing or at a regional consultation should inform the Commission of their desire to do so by writing to the Secretary General, CRTC, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N2 (fax: 8199940218) no later than June 29, 1995. Written comments must also be received by the same date.

"This is an issue for all Canadians, especially parents, teachers, young people, social workers, mental-health specialists and public interest groups," said Mr. Spicer. "It is vital that we hear from them, as well as from creators, producers, broadcasters and distributors. To this end, the Commission will be announcing procedures for the regional consultations following the comment period."

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Contact: CRTC Public Affairs, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N2
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Copies of today's notice of public hearing are available through the public examination room at any of the following CRTC offices:

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